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Friendship vs. Authorship

Year

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Description

This case discusses issues of authorship in a lab or research group setting, the problems that occur when policies regarding collaborations are not in place and a faculty member's responsibility to students as a mentor.

Body

Dr. Jane McDonald is a psychology professor at a university in Texas. Her good friend and colleague, Dr. David Woodford, is a psychology professor at a university in Alabama. Both Jane and David are members of a professional psychology association that has requested the assistance of its members in conducting a large national survey. Although Jane and David are not teaching at the same university, they went to graduate school together and thought it would be fun to collaborate on this study. After some discussion and planning, they informed the professional association that they would be happy to conduct the study. During the planning stage, they agreed that since Jane would be doing more of the logistics of the study, she would be listed as first author and David would be listed as second when it came time to publish.

Jane approached one of her graduate students, Mark Dunn, and asked him if he would be interested in taking responsibility for the logistical aspects of the study, such as mailing the surveys and data entry. Mark was informed that he would not be responsible for the new data analysis or final report since David would be doing these tasks. However, Jane did not discuss the issue of authorship with Mark. Mark,

new in the psychology program, was flattered to be asked and agreed to participate.

Eight months later Mark completed his portion of the study and sent the data to David for analysis. Several weeks later Jane approached Mark and told him that David had not completed the data analysis and it needed to be done. Furthermore, she needed to have the data in a final report format so that she could present it at a conference in two weeks. Mark spent most of the next two weeks conducting the data analysis and writing the final report. Jane expressed her gratitude to Mark for his commitment to the project and asked if he would be interested in collaborating on the final paper for publication. Mark agreed.

Two months after Jane and Mark had this discussion, Jane handed Mark a final draft of a manuscript that was to be submitted the next week for publication. Never in the previous two months had Jane asked Mark to help with writing the paper. Furthermore, although David had not contributed to writing the paper, he was listed as second author and Mark was listed as third. Mark approached Jane and expressed his confusion as to why he was not asked to participate, and why David was listed as second author. Jane stated that she was too busy to collaborate and that it saved her time to write the paper herself. Furthermore, she and David had an agreement about authorship from the beginning, and nothing could be done to change the arrangement.

Discussion Questions

1. Since Mark was not included in the planning stages of the study, should he be included as an author?
2. Should participation in some parts of a study have greater weight in determining authorship than participation in other parts?
3. Although Jane and David reached an agreement at the outset of the study, should David be included as an author?
4. Did Jane let her friendship with David get in the way of doing what was right with regard to including Mark as second author?
5. How could Jane have handled this situation in a way that was fair to her?
6. How could Jane have handled this situation in a way that was fair to Mark?
7. Did Jane deceive Mark when she failed to collaborate with him in writing the paper?
8. What can Mark do to ensure that he receives proper credit for his work?

Notes

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